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1. I think one of the more important things that ranking does it implicitly forces the participant to create ranking criteria and evaluate the items along those criteria. If you were to compare creating a ranked list with simply creating a list I think even if explicit justifications are not required the majority of students will create ranking criteria and use it to evaluate the items. It also opens the door to debate amongst students on the merits not only of their ranking but of the criteria themselves as they feel the need to justify their decisions and consider other frameworks.
2. To set up the tool the instructor need to create the team logins, name of project, an overview of the project as well a s a specific prompt for the ranking criteria and the list of items to sort. The instructor could also create supplemental materials like handouts or detailed descriptions of the items to facilitate use of tool. The instructor should also be prepared with topics to facilitate discussion of the ranking in relation to other groups.
3. I think this tool has really great applications for social studies where thing tend to be naturally complicated and ambiguous. This could be used *ante* or *ex* any major event for causes or outcomes. It could also be used for major periods or geopolitical units (e.g. major characteristics of the Meiji period in Japan). I think using it *ante* major events has probably the greatest potential though as causes of major events a naturally nebulous. You could have them rank items from a certain worldview you were trying to teach. For example you could have the students assume the identities of different schools of thought Marx, Wallerstein, realpolitik etc. and then discuss differences in the ranking and criteria used as well as which one they associate with.